

ENHANCING ACCESS TO NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN BOORLOO: THE *HEALTHY BLOOD HEALTHY BODY* PROJECT

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Background: Needle and syringe programs (NSPs) are a cost-effective public health strategy for reducing harms associated with injecting drug use (IDU). However, disparities in health outcomes remain. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience higher hepatitis C notification rates, and although HIV notification rates are comparable, a greater proportion of HIV notifications are attributed to IDU compared with the non-Indigenous Australian population. Access to NSPs can be impeded by factors such as service availability, which may be exacerbated in the context of shame and stigma. Applying Indigenous knowledges for more culturally responsive services can enhance service delivery and engagement. Using a strengths-based approach, the Healthy Blood Healthy Body project sought to improve access to NSPs for Aboriginal peoples who inject drugs (PWID) in Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar, Boorloo (Perth).

Methods: Healthy Blood Healthy Body utilised a participatory action research framework to develop five Aboriginal-led and co-designed consumer strategies. Grounded in culture with a health promotion lens, strategy development and implementation occurred over four years, guided by an Aboriginal Advisory Group and supported by a Co-Design Working Group comprised of key sector stakeholders, NSP service users, and the wider community.

Results: Key outcomes will be presented: strategies for increasing cultural safety in alcohol and other drug harm reduction settings, including NSPs, informed by consumer yarns and scoping review; a resource for building the cultural capabilities of NSP staff; a community education campaign, showcasing assets produced, to encourage safer IDU and increase NSP service awareness; evaluation outcomes from an incentives-based peer referral pilot program; and recommendations for increasing engagement of Aboriginal PWID with NSPs.

Conclusion: Healthy Blood Healthy Body activities have the potential to be scaled up or adapted for regional areas or other jurisdictions. We anticipate that outcomes will contribute to more culturally responsive NSPs, ultimately increasing their utilisation and reducing IDU harm.

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